



Opening Statement: Hearing on Drought Legislation
Opening Statement: Nominations Hearing
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
October 20, 2015

We are here this morning to consider a total of six nominations before the committee – three for each of the departments that are under our jurisdiction.

For the Department of Energy, we have:

- Dr. Cherry Murray, to be Director of the Office of Science;
- Ms. Victoria Wassmer, to be Under Secretary of Energy; and
- Mr. John Kotek, to be the Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy.

For the Department of the Interior, we have:

- Ms. Mary Kendall, to be Inspector General;
- Dr. Suzette Kimball, to be Director of the USGS; and
- Ms. Kristen Sarri, to be the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget.

I have said before this committee that Secretary Moniz in my opinion is doing a good job at the Department of Energy. I don't necessarily agree with everything – but he works with us, he listens to us, and I believe that he deserves to have his team in place to support him.

Unfortunately, I'm not able to say the same when it comes to the Secretary of the Interior. Instead, the Interior Department's record has been very frustrating – particularly if you are an Alaskan. We're seeing decisions out of Interior that are really destroying our hope to be independent as a state.

Ms. Sarri, as the Interior Department describes the position you have been nominated for as “providing overall policy direction, leadership, guidance, and assistance on a broad range of management and operational issues,” I would say that the Department needs serious help in those areas, given the repeated policy disappointments that we're seeing in my state.

We had one bit of good news when the President came to the state in August; when he made the decision to rename Denali as Denali. We appreciated that. But Interior has also closed off half of our National Petroleum Reserve, which was specifically designated for oil production. It has stalled projects in the NPR-A that would help restore throughput in our trans-Alaska pipeline system. It's effectively locked nearly all of ANWR up as permanent wilderness, despite opposition from 70-plus percent of Alaskans.

I'm certainly not going to forget the heartless decision that Interior made to deny King Cove an 11-mile, life-saving road nearly two years ago – or the absolute lack of assistance that Interior has provided since then, as we have seen 32 more medivacs from that community.

And then we've had more recent examples that get my attention in a very strong way. A few weeks ago, the deteriorating regulatory environment played a key role in Shell's decision to abandon seven years of work and \$7 billion in investment in the offshore Arctic. And then just this past Friday, Interior rejected lease extensions and canceled the offshore sales that are scheduled for 2016 and 2017. So if you're an Alaskan, and reading the headlines, you have to wonder: what's going on within Interior? Why do they have it out for us? How can Interior set up a regulatory regime that prevents companies from having commercially viable exploration programs, and then claim that it shows a "lack of interest" in the Arctic?

So Ms. Sarri, this is the long way of saying that you're going to need to convince me that you are part of the solution, and not part of the problem, for Alaska at the Interior Department.

And then when Ms. Kendall comes before us I have had good discussions with her but I am attempting to reconcile two conflicting impulses when it comes to this particular nomination. I strongly believe that Interior needs a permanent IG, and I'm disappointed the Administration has let the position go unfilled for six and a half years. But I am also committed to ensuring that the individual we confirm is fully independent, with good judgment in difficult situations and a firm grasp of the responsibilities of an Inspector General – not only to the Secretary, but to Congress as well. The law requires an IG to meet her independent obligations to Congress, and, while we expect that the IG always to approach her work with civility, she must never compromise her independence.

So Ms. Kendall, I am sure you understand that the bar for an IG is high, especially as your confirmation would be tantamount to a lifetime appointment. The tenure that you have been involved with thus far in this position has been marked by controversy so you will hear legitimate questions raised today as to whether or not you are the right fit for the permanent positions.

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